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Article (Accepted Version)

Killick, Evan. 2017. Rubber, *Terra Preta* and Soy: A Study of Visible and Invisible Amazonian Modernities. *Journal of Anthropological Research.* Accepted for publication 17th June 2017. Accepted, pre-publication version.

Rubber, *Terra Preta* and Soy: A Study of Visible and Invisible Amazonian Modernities

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Abstract: Amazonia in contemporary academic as well as public discourse is often placed in opposition to modernity, its peoples and environment represented as offering an alternative to modern ways of seeing and being in the world. Through a contemporary and historical consideration of the Brazilian Amazonian town of Belterra this paper questions such a perspective by emphasizing the complexity of local social and environmental realities as well as the form that outside, modern interventions have taken in the region. The identities of neo-Amazonian populations are also discussed, both in relation to their relative invisibility in anthropological theory and wider political narratives as well as the manner in which their indigeneity is now emerging in local contexts. Overall it is argued that paying attention to social and environmental complexity as well as the hybrid social and cultural forms of the region may offer hope for a shared social and environmental future.

Key words: Amazonia, Amerindian, Nature, Environment, Modernity

INTRODUCTION

Since the first European encounters with the Americas the region has tended to serve as a site onto which outsiders could project their own preoccupations with modernity (Mason 1990). One school of thought even situates the establishment of modern European identity to the moment of their initial contact with the Americas (Todorov 1984:4-5, see Harris 1995:10). In the contemporary context it is arguably Amazonia and its inhabitants that have retained that position as the archetypal 'non-modern' other, associated with the 'primitive' and 'traditional', a space and its peoples dominated and defined by nature and outside of time (see Oakdale & Watson's

introduction to this volume). This perspective underpins two broad approaches to the region as either a space to which modernity must be brought or one in which modernity can find antidotes to its own destructive tendencies. In the contemporary period this dichotomy plays out most clearly in the debates over national development and environmentalist concerns, particularly around the trade-offs surrounding megaprojects and large-scale agricultural. This binarism is also present in recent anthropological theory that has focused on apparent ontological alterity.

Based on fieldwork in and around Belterra, a town situated in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon with an interesting and varied history of attempts to introduce forms of large-scale agriculture, this article examines some of the conflicts but also correspondences between apparently culturally distinct ways of relating to nature. Starting with attempts by the Ford Motor Company to set up a rubber tree plantation, the article goes on to consider older uses of the land as well as the complex social and ethnic history of the area and its populations. All of this leads us to current debates about the role and activities of larger-scale farmers who have been immigrating to the region from Brazilian's southern states. Here again it is argued that simple contrasts are difficult to maintain under close analysis of everyday activities and discussions of environmental use. Overall, the article argues that an attention to individual engagements with society and nature and the connections such comparisons throw up across apparently clear social and cultural divides may be the most productive way to forge new common futures, rather than a focus on apparent ontological alterity.

Before moving on to an introduction to the fieldsite of Belterra I will begin with a discussion of current anthropological engagements with modernity.

MODERNITY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is itself implicated in the creation and perpetuation of definitions and separations of different populations having been, since its earliest beginnings, understood precisely as the study of those groups of people that were outside of European modernity. This is clearly seen in early anthropological approaches, particularly those which sought evolutionary explanations for human variation and ultimately made judgments on their relative development in relation to their ability to dominate their surroundings (Bloch 2005:3-4). In the Amazonian context such trends are clear in anthropological approaches that understood Amazonian peoples as limited by their environments; chiefly in the form of poor soils (Meggers 1996 [1971]) or the availability of protein (Gross 1975). Yet even as the inherent hierarchies of evolutionary and environmental determinist views have been rejected by mainstream, 'diffusionist', anthropology (Bloch 2005) the echoes of the binary view can still be discerned. In the Amazonian context this is first apparent in the continued focus on Amerindians[1], as opposed to the full range of populations present in the region. As Stephen Nugent has observed, "For most non-specialists (and many specialists) Amazonian anthropology is synonymous with… studies of Amerindian social formations" (Nugent 1997:39). This preoccupation with Amerindian social and cultural forms can be linked to a second example of anthropology's continued binarism apparent in the more theoretical debates around ontology. Founded, in part, on Viveiros de Castro's work on Amerindian perspectivism (1998 & 2012 see also Ramos 2012) such work focuses on the radical alterity apparently offered by Amerindian conceptions of nature and culture in contrast to that of the 'modern' worldview. The manner in which this approach has been taken up and applied to the continued distinction between modernity and its other is most clearly seen in the work of Bruno Latour, who even as one of his central arguments is precisely that 'We Have Never Been Modern' (1994), continues to draw heavily on the Amazonian ethnographic work of Viveiros de

Castro (1998 & 2012) and Philippe Descola (1994) to emphasize ontological separations between the two 'warring' realms of 'we' 'Moderns'[2] and Amerindians (Latour 2004:461, see also Latour 2002).

Latour's approach echoes wider definitions of modernity as referring to those "modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens 1990:1). Linked to the rise of both industrialization and the nation-state, modernity is associated with the scientific approach in which the world can be observed and experimented on to produce a logical and rational, abstract and totalizing view of the world (Latour 1993:3 & 2013:8). Implicit in this view of modernity is the existence of its counterpart, that is 'traditional' societies, characterized by more communal forms of living and thinking and adherence to older beliefs and Latour is not alone in marking this separation. For some writers this distinction is best characterized as one between the image of an 'organic' and a 'mechanistic' cosmos. For example Merchant (1990) associates the former with 'a living female earth' (p.xvi) and 'close-knit, cooperative, organic communities' (p.1) and the latter with nature as "dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans" (p.xvi) and the rise of the "exploitation of both human and nature resources in the name of culture and progress" (p.xxii). Escobar takes this approach further explicitly labeling the mechanistic regime 'capitalist' (Escobar 1999:1). While for Merchant in particular the organic mode is associated with pre-enlightenment European societies, for writers including Latour and Escobar it is also associated with contemporary non-European, non-capitalist societies.

For all three of these writers, Latour, Escobar and Merchant, part of the importance of recognizing this distinction and valorizing organic and less-mechanistic perspectives of the world is for their implications for current environmental concerns. Merchant is explicit in linking her work to attempts to solve 'our current environmental dilemma' (Merchant 1990:xxi), while Escobar (2011) uses his approach to consider a transition towards sustainability. For Latour a key first step is that a focus on ontological difference allows the 'moderns' to enter into more realistic dialogue and negotiations with the 'other' (Latour 2013:xxvii). The suggestion being that such dialogue can be the basis for producing solutions to shared global issues, particularly in the form of human-induced climate change. While supporting such aims I will suggest that approaches that focus on ontological difference are undermined by their inability to move beyond the distinctions that they draw, even as their work has much to say about hybridity and transformation. My argument instead is that a closer examination of on the ground relations between individuals and their surroundings offers correspondences and connections that may be more useful in forging a common future than a preoccupation with radical alterity. In what follows I will emphasize this point by exploring past and present examples of apparently modern approaches to the region and the views of and relations with the environment that they espoused, observations which undermine attempts to maintain strict ontological boundaries. This complexity is then further emphasized by paying careful attention to local social and cultural forms that emphasize the hybrid and heterogeneous reality of all contemporary Amazonian populations, a reality that is too often absent from anthropological accounts of the region, an issue to which I now turn.

NEO-AMAZONIANS

One corollary of the early view of Amazonia as a space dominated and defined by nature was that the region was deemed incapable of supporting complex societies (Roosevelt 1999). Amerindian

groups were considered to be living at the limits of what the environment would allow (Meggers 1996 [1971] and Gross 1975) while any other permanent groups that were not immediately identified as Amerindian were considered to be examples of "the failure of agrarian capitalism… and the devolution of peasant livelihood to a repertoire of extractive, small-scale agricultural and trading activities" (Nugent 1997:40). From the anthropological perspective Nugent argues that such groups, the *caboclos* of Brazilian Amazonia or *mestizos* in its Spanish-speaking areas, were barely recognized as having societies or culture at all (1990:124-5). As he writes:

> The adjective most commonly applied to the economy and society of *caboclos* is 'stagnant', a term which usefully connotes jungle/river complex naturalism as well as moral failing. Unreliable, quixotic and malevolent, the *caboclo* lives in the cracks of a colonial mosaic in which the dominant images shift between forest-primordial and European conquest (Nugent 1990:17).

This disciplinary discrimination has meant that even as the regional space of Amazonia has come to be dominated by these 'neo-Amazonians' the ethnographic record remains clearly skewed in favor of Amerindians[3]. As noted above, this has had clear consequences for how the culture and politics of the region has been portrayed and then fed back into anthropological theory itself. Rather than reflecting a complex heterogeneous cultural and social reality, anthropological depictions of Amazonia continue to be dominated by Amerindians, who are further homogenized in attempts to link their worldviews to a single ontological framework regardless of their geographic, linguistic or historical specificities (Ramos 2012:482). The outcome of this academic approach is the tautologous situation that anthropology is concerned with only those Amazonians that "embody other people's expectations of 'real' Amazonian qualities" (Nugent 1990:18, see

also Ramos 1994). This, in turn, reinforces the invisibility of the 'other Amazonians' while discounting local processes of hybridity and transformation.

While, as we shall see, there have been particular moments of large-scale immigration to the Brazilian Amazon nevertheless the region has hosted a cosmopolitan population since soon after the first expeditions by Europeans in the 16th Century. These include not only people from the Iberian peninsular and Latin American countries but also Europeans from Holland, Great Britain and France as well as Japanese and Lebanese and disparate groups from Africa and the Caribbean (Nugent 2007:46, see also Dean 1987:49 & 85)[4]. These diverse groups have come and intermingled not only with each other but also with those groups already in the region, including the descendants of the region's aboriginal populations. The reality of Amazonian has thus long been of a heterogeneous population with most being able, if not politically or socially willing, to claim indigenous ancestry – a point to which we will return below. As Harris has noted:

> The aboriginal population may have been destroyed, dispossessed and displaced, but in their place a new population grew up, the children of the sexual unions between Indians (mostly women, and those unable to re-form elsewhere) and Europeans (mostly men). It is vital to include this new population alongside what was taking place in the re-formation of aboriginal society. (Harris 1998:86-7)

That is both contemporary Amerindian and neo-Amazonian populations are the outcome of half a millennium of interaction with processes of colonization and modernity. Indeed, as we will consider further below, the commonly accepted attribute of Amazonian Amerindian societies as being relatively small, close-knit communities dispersed across a wide 'natural' landscape is a direct outcome of the decimation of older aboriginal societies after the incursion of European

peoples. As Nugent has noted, "It should not be surprising that what catches the eye of the European is that which s/he is largely responsible for. Much of the apparent strangeness of the juxtapositions reflects the presence of Europe lurking in the background" (Nugent 1990:22). While in some ways Belterra is a very specific example its complex and varied history does effectively represent the wider, complex history of Amazonia that work focused solely on Amerindian experiences tends to neglect. Amazonia has not existed in social, political or environmental isolation for over 500 years and geo-political and economic realities have shaped, and continue to shape, all aspects of its social and environmental reality.

METHODOLOGY AND THE FIELDSITE

Research for this project was conducted over two, three-month periods in 2009 and 2010 in Belterra and the surrounding area. My previous fieldwork experience had been with Amerindian communities in Peruvian Amazonia which had emphasized the complex webs of legal, social and economic relations within which contemporary Amerindians are enmeshed and the variety of people and groups with whom they interact (Killick 2008a & 2008b). In the new project I was keen to put such interactions at the center of the research and chose an area, topic and inter-disciplinary approach that would address some of the key debates surrounding the region's current and future development. This led me to Santarém where the agricultural giant Cargill had recently opened a grain terminal as a northern route for the export of agricultural commodities and debates around land use and regional development were very much in the public consciousness. I chose Belterra as a base because, positioned on a fertile plateau outside of Santarém city, it has a of its long history of agricultural activity the latest of which has been the growth of soybean farms. These farms were mostly being created by migrants of primarily northern-European descent (known locally as *Gauchos*) from Brazil's southern states.

The research included participant observation and more formal interviewing across a wide range of the local population including these recent migrants and older populations that had a variety of livelihoods, including both small and large-scale agriculture and private and state employment, as well as the unemployed and retired. An effort was made to seek out different members of society according to age, ancestry, and socio-economic status, with interviews focused explicitly on attitudes to the environment, local development, agriculture, and government policies. This ethnographic work was conducted in tandem with economic analysis of large-scale agriculture in the region (Weinhold, Killick & Reis 2013).

Santarém and its environs have an interesting and varied history. Located at the mouth of the Tapajós where it enters the channel of the main Amazon River archaeological evidence shows large settlements from before and during the early period of European interaction. While Santarém city continues to lag a long way behind Brazil's other Amazonian cities of Manaus and Belém it has always been an important center for regional trade serving riverine communities up and down the lower Amazon. During Brazil's military rule from the 1960s to the early 1980s and the associated moves to integrate Amazonia more fully into the national polity and economy Santarém was a National Security Area (Nugent 1990:104). This brought an increased military presence and the deliberate investment in infrastructure including a spur to connect it to the then under-construction Trans-Amazonian Highway, the path of which passes 120 miles south of the city. These projects along with the government's resettlement programs aimed at poorer rural peasants brought a wave of migrants to the region in the 1970s. Mainly Afro-Brazilian *nordestinos*[5] they swelled the population of Santarém and their presence is still widely felt in the region. While each of these migrant populations has brought new cultural and social aspects to the region they have also, as we shall see, been steadily integrated into it, emphasizing that

modernity is not something that is only being brought from outside but is also an autochthonous, on-going project that is occurring within Amazonian society itself.

Having given this basic historical and sociological background to the fieldsite I will now give a more ethnographic introduction to the places and questions with which this article is concerned.

BELTERRA

The town of Belterra sits on a bluff overlooking the Tapajós River approximately 20 miles from where it runs into the main course of the Amazon. The houses at its center are filled with retirees from Brazil's Ministry of Agriculture who are usually more than willing to show you around their homes and gardens. They talk with pride about the history and character of the town but their most common comment is over how green and peaceful the town is, especially in comparison to the dirt and congestion of the nearby city of Santarém. To emphasize this point many of them will insist on showing visitors around the spacious gardens behind their houses, pointing out the various trees, palms and shrubs and commenting on how nice it is to sit out under the shade of the trees on a hot afternoon. 'I used to like to sleep out here' one old man, Miguel, told me as he showed me one tree that he had surrounded with benches and hammock poles. 'We would sit drinking and talking late into the night and sometimes just sleep here all night. It is very beautiful and tranquil here. Not like in the city. We are with nature here.'

Fig 1. Belterra House

Further away on the outskirts of town there is a sign reading 'Sítio Bom-Futuro' (Good Future Farm). Here an old man, Héctor, also welcomed me to his home and proudly showed me around his land. At the time of my fieldwork he was 74 and had lived most of his life around Belterra. While he noted that his maternal grandfather was '*Português*[6]', he identified himself and his father as '*Índios*'. Widowed, with his one son based with the Brazilian Air Force in São Paulo and his seven daughters in various towns and cities across the region he lived alone tending to his chickens and his various fruit trees and crops. His plot is similar to those found throughout the wider Amazon region with a wooden house, thatched with palm fronds and furnished with log stools and rough planks that act as shelves and tables. Around the house there are pecking chickens and a few dogs while the wider plot is planted with different crops including manioc plants and corn, with shrubs and fruit trees interspersed throughout. The showpiece of his land, however, is a small hollow at the bottom of which lies a water hole. Héctor told me that the water is deep and that he has never known it to dry up. It certainly has lots of fish in it and I also

spotted a small turtle sitting on a log. As with residents in the center of town Héctor noted how cool and refreshing it is to sit out under the trees and he also referred to the feature as 'natural', noting that 'it has always been here'.

Fig 2. Sítio Bom-Futuro

While neither of these examples centers on a 'traditional' Amerindian community the settings fit with popular visions of Amazonia as a place dominated by nature while the individuals themselves fit with outside ideas of Amazonian peoples as valuing and being close to the environments in which they find themselves. Both Miguel and Héctor also constantly and explicitly contrasted themselves and their ways of living with people living in the cities, both the local city of Santarém but also the larger Amazonian cities of Manaus and Belém, as well as São Paulo and Brasília. Where people in cities live rushed lives surrounded by concrete and asphalt, locally it is argued that out in the forest one lives a more relaxed life in concert with the natural environment around you. Such local visions fit with broader, popular and academic separations of the modern and the traditional, with the city as the archetypal place of modernity, separated

from nature while traditional forms of living are tied to living in and with more natural environments.

Yet, while Belterra is situated deep in the Amazon basin its origins and form stem from the efforts and ideals of Henry Ford and his Ford Motor Company, archetypal symbols of modernity in its most capitalistic and industrial form. This history is most obvious in the architecture of its houses, built in a North American design with wooden walls, tiled roofs and a front gable (see also Grandin 2009:296-8). While a few of these houses remained scattered around the community the majority of them line the streets in the area known as the Vila Americana. Here the houses sit on plots that include small front gardens and relatively extensive rear gardens, of the kind Miguel showed me with pride.

These gardens were part of the town's original design and construction in 1934 when the company's architects and engineers laid out the streets and pavements, water and sewage, trees and parks. They constructed houses following a Cape Cod style, complete with front gardens and backyards (*Ibid.*). Meaning that the residents' beloved gardens are less representative of an older Amazonian environment than they are of Henry Ford's own particular vision of a modernity in which industrial production and pastoral living were combined rather than seen as antithetical.

Belterra was the second town that the Ford Motor Company had built, after the problems that had been encountered at its more famous sister site of Fordlândia, 80 miles further up the Tapajós. Both sites were founded as rubber plantations with their associated towns built to house the company's managers and workers. Fordlândia was founded in 1927 when Ford secured a concession from the Brazilian government for one million hectares. His plan was to produce

rubber that would make his company and the United States more generally less dependent on the British controlled rubber plantations in Asia (Machado 1975:203-4). It also fitted with his wider idea that the Ford Motor Company should have complete control over all aspects of the cars that they were making, from raw materials to their sale (Grandin 2009:2).

Characteristically for Ford at that time Fordlândia and then Belterra were set up with little limit on their initial costs[7]. While work began on cutting back the forest to plant row upon row of rubber trees work also began on building model towns. At both sites there was a grid of streets, lined with houses with different designs for different levels of workers. There was also a school, a hospital, a central food hall and a 'club house' complete with swimming pool and golf course. This attention to the comfort and surroundings of his employees was more than just a business decision, it can be understood as the physical manifestation of Ford's own vision of the future of industrialism. For while Ford is renowned for the methods he pioneered to increase industrial production, particularly in the form of the assembly line, his preferred future did not involve ever-larger factories. Even as he was building the world-famous River Rouge factory in Dearborn, Ford was also acquiring sites for what became known as his 'Village Industries'. In part these were about the practical benefits of decentralized production and of access to raw materials, however, the historian Howard Segal suggests that they can also be understood as an expression of Ford's "lifelong values about the way life should be" (Segal 2005:4).

As Segal notes "[Ford] never resolved his mixed feelings about modernity", particularly as it was manifested in the growing industrial cities such as Detroit with their congestion, mass of humanity, impersonality and relative squalor (Segal 2005:3). Reynold Wik similarly writes that "[Ford] often spoke of the industrial cities as unnatural, artificial monstrosities where factories

belched out smoke which begrimed the workers and forced them to live in crowded slums" (Wik 1973:191). It was precisely to counteract such developments that Ford envisaged his village industries program. Based in existing rural settlements, often with a mill or small industrial site already in place, Ford sort to create the smaller-scale industrial production of parts for his cars, trucks and tractors. There were economic arguments for dispersing production, linked to cheaper land and labor in rural areas, but Ford's approach was also driven by his wider concern with the social and environmental changes that large-scale industrialization was bringing. Such observations have led Wik and others to argue for seeing Ford and particularly his emphasis on smaller-scale and dispersed production as anticipating more recent ecological and environmental concerns (*Ibid.*, see also Brinkley 2003:443).

While it would be going too far to place the popularizer of the automobile, mass production and consequently mass consumption in the mold of contemporary environmentalists, Ford's attempts to disperse the industrial process point to a deeper understanding of humans' relation to their environment that might be termed, 'ecological', or to use Merchant's framing 'organic'. That is they emphasize that Ford understood the world as a single interconnected system. On the first page of Ford's autobiography he writes:

> When one speaks of increasing power, machinery, and industry there comes up a picture of a cold, metallic sort of world in which great factories will drive away the trees, the flowers, the birds, and the green fields. And that then we shall have a world composed of metal machines and human machines. With all of that I do not agree. I think that unless we know more about machines and their use, unless we better

> understand the mechanical portion of life, we cannot have the time to enjoy the trees, and the birds, and the flowers, and the green fields (Ford 1923:1)

Such writing emphasizes that for Ford machines and industrial processes were not necessarily an anathema to their surroundings but rather could and should work in harmony with the environments around them.

Greg Grandin has emphasized that Ford's philosophy had antecedents in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American political and literary concepts. The view "that mechanization marked not the conquest but the realization of nature's secrets and thus the attainment of the pastoral ideal" (Grandin 2009:257). Ford explicitly followed the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his vision of industrialization as a 'rejuvenating' force "that would help man fully realize the wonders of the natural world" (*Ibid.*:57) and it was this vision that ultimately underpinned his hope for the 'industrial pastoralism' of his village industries. In his full vision such places would allow people to live in semi-urban areas, giving their labor to factories some of the time but also still raising agricultural products for food as well as industrial purposes, such as rubber and timber. Further, such settings would allow people to engage more fully with their surroundings, in contrast to their perceived forms of living in the ever-growing cities[8]. This idea of dispersed urbanism was also not unique to Ford. The architect Frank Lloyd Wright was developing similar ideas in dialogue with Ford (*Ibid.*:66-7) and both were influenced by the earlier ideas of Ebenezer Howard.

In Howard's seminal work *Garden Cities of To-morrow* he argued that "Town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilisation"

(1902:28). Towards this end he set out a blueprint for his garden cities that included industry, residences, agricultural and forest land while being separated from other cities by 'open country' (see Fig 4). This emphasizes that Fordlândia and Belterra were not a specifically Amazonian project, but rather that their origins and design was founded in contemporary North American and European thought. Within Ford's empire they were only the furthest-flung examples of a range of similar towns that Ford helped create across the United States[9]. While Ford's vision of modernity thus clearly entailed mechanization and industrialization this was meant to occur in relative consonance with an area's environment.

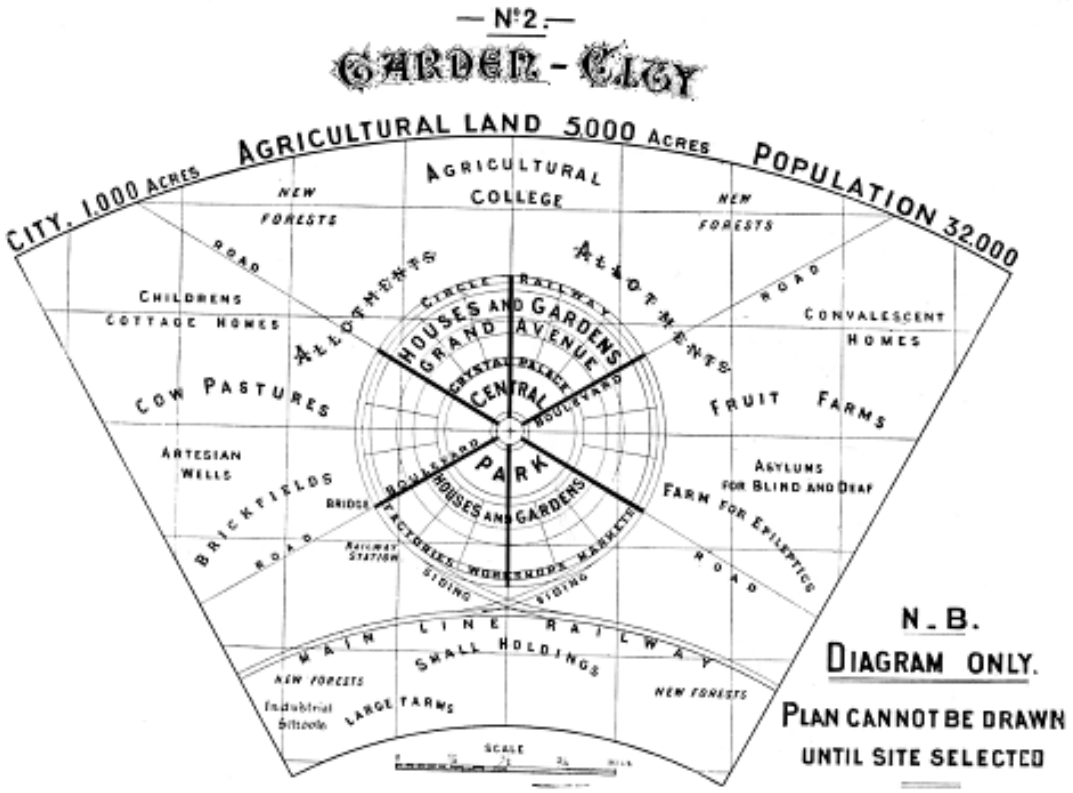

Fig 3. A ground-plan for Howard's Garden City (Howard 1902:33).

In this understanding of the world, industrialization and machines are still beholden to the environments in which they find themselves and humans must take this into consideration as they construct their futures. In this sense Ford's view might be presented as 'ecological' or 'organic',

in its sense of understanding of the world as a single, whole and finite system in which machines themselves are subject to their surroundings and whose positioning and running is dependent on their environment and its limitations. As Anna Bramwell has noted "Ecological economists are claimed by some writers to be the first *real* ecologists. Certainly the call to conserve scarce resources is today perhaps the strongest green argument" (Bramwell 1989:64). That is Ford did not have a sense that the world and its resources were infinite and human domination therefore limitless. Instead he saw the importance of making his own endeavors, as well as that of his wider company, fit within these constraints and engage with the wider world system. Ultimately this worldview understands humans as part of a single system to which they must continue to adapt themselves and their technology. Here then, while Ford's ideas clearly retain notions of modernity in the appeal to a relatively rationalist vision of the world and dependence on technology, they also show a much more hybrid and unseparated vision of the relation between nature and human actions than that usually associated with the term.

Such arguments are interesting in light of those approaches, including the recent writings on ontologies mentioned at the start of this article, that continue to focus on the separations between modernist understandings of human relations to their surroundings and those of other societies. Here then, rather than seeing modernity as inextricably joined to an understanding of humans as separate from their surroundings we can see an example of a more complex modernity. While Ford, Fordlândia and Belterra form a very particular example they are important first and not least because Henry Ford and the company he founded are so synonymous with so much of modernity. If the man who brought so many aspects of modernity into people's everyday lives held and expounded such ideas then it emphasizes that a focus on the distinctions of 'modern' thinking may be misguided and act to mask more complex and hybrid approaches to the world. In

a parallel fashion in what follows we will now turn to consider the complexities of other Amazonian relations with the environment. This brings us back to the second case outlined in the introduction, Héctor's farm.

BOM FUTURO

Further out from Belterra the central part of Héctor's land shows no sign of Ford's intervention, nor of the more recent incursions of soy farming. The environment of Héctor's farm is not therefore such a recent creation or obvious outcome of outside intervention. Its 'natural' status, however, was questioned one day as I sat talking to him and two pick-up trucks pulled up and offloaded a team of archaeologists. They were conducting an archaeological survey linked to the nearby construction of the BR-163 and were particularly interested in the water hole which they had seen on an earlier trip a few years previously. One of the archaeologists, Per Stenborg, told me at the time that the feature had almost certainly been made by humans and that the whole area is a '*terra preta*' site. *Terra preta* (literally 'black earth') being the name given to areas of dark and fertile anthropogenic soil found across the Amazon region. The earth on Héctor's farm forms a natural depression so it may have been that water naturally gathered there but it seems clear, from the depth and spherical form of the hole that it was further excavated and augmented in the period before European contact.

Since that meeting Stenborg and his team have published a study of the area. They write that:

> our investigations showed that this whole area has been considerably transformed by human action in the past… with land modification processes such as the construction of a water reservoir (Stenborg *et al.* 2014:152)

Radiocarbon and optical dating methods indicate that human action, along with the occupation of associated settlements throughout the Belterra plateau, were most extensive in the centuries leading up to the period of European contact, with some overlap into the contact period itself. Specifically the dates for the Bom Futuro site range from "*c*. A.D. 1300 up to historical times" (*Ibid.*). Analysis of the site also leads the archaeologists to note the extensive water management techniques used in the area, without which permanent human settlement across the plateau would have been difficult (*Ibid.*:153). These observations for this site parallel the wider picture that has emerged in recent decades around Santarém as well as the Amazon basin as a whole.

In fact the Belterra sites while relatively complex and extensive appear to have been only satellite localities, connected to the much larger permanent settlements at the mouth of the Tapajós. There Clement *et al.* have noted that the whole network of occupation areas occupied 400 hectares with sites continuing up and down river from Santarém on both the bluffs and lowlands (2015:5). Anna Roosevelt observes that the main site at Santarém contains "neighborhoods with parallel rows of house mounds rich in fragmentary artifacts and biological remains, next to ceremonial structures and craft production areas" (2013:80). Clement *et al.* argue that such finds have led to a consensus among historical ecologists "that Amazonia is a complex mosaic of coupled human-natural systems, typical of anthropogenic biomes or anthromes globally, refuting earlier claims of uniform environmental limitations" (2015:1). They go on to note the domestication of relatively large areas of the region through the transformation of various plant resources for relatively intensive forms of harvesting which in turn helped fuel population expansion (*Ibid.*:2-4).

Writing about archaeological findings along the Xingu River exhibiting similarly complex habitation and agricultural spaces Michael Heckenberger categorizes them as 'urbanized

networks' and explicitly compares them to the kind of 'Garden Cities of To-morrow' proposed by Ebenezer Howard (1902). Heckenberger argues that:

> Far from stereotypical models of small tropical forest tribes, these patterns document carefully engineered landscapes designed to work with the forest and wetland ecologies in complex urbanized networks (Heckenberger 2012:1)

Such findings emphasize the complexity of Amazonia's human and ecological history and undermine any simplistic understanding of current and past Amazonian peoples' relations with their surroundings.

While there are limits to how much can be read into the parallels between 20th century ideas of Garden Cities and the archaeological evidence of Amazonian urbanized networks they are a physical reminder that the argued separations between Amerindian and modern forms of living are not as radical as is often suggested (see also Nunes Filho 2011:105-6). In the same way that I have argued that Ford's vision and actions call to attention the diversity of modern forms of viewing and interacting with the environment, so too do these archaeological findings highlight the diversity and complexity of indigenous interactions with their surroundings[10]. Above all they emphasize two points. First that Amazonia is not a space defined by nature and outside of time but rather is the result of long and complex human-nature interactions and co-creations. Second that any apparent contemporary dominance of nature and relative paucity of human populations is a direct consequence of human (specifically European) intervention, rather than a result of environmental or human technological limitations (see also Harris 1998:86 and Viveiros de Castro 1996:186). These observations return us to the issue of Amazonian identities.

NEO-INDIANS

As I noted in the brief ethnographic description of Bom-Futuro farm its owner, Héctor, identified himself and his father as '*Índios*'. This use was somewhat surprising as until recently the term carried very negative connotations in the region. As Nugent described in the 1970s and 80s: "To be 'Indian' is to be something not quite human, Indians being widely regarded as the archetypal *bugre mansos* (tame wild men)" (Nugent 1993:126). As such Nugent noted that individuals would not link themselves explicitly to such identities, even as it was generally assumed that most of the local population did have indigenous heritage. If an ethnic category was used by local populations that did not primarily identify themselves as *nordestinos* then it was as *caboclos*, a term denoting mixed heritage. My own experience generally paralleled Nugent's further observation that in the local context it is residence that confers identity more than claims to 'ethnic or cultural identity' (*ibid.*:113). In the contemporary era most people choose to identify themselves as *Belterrense, Santarenos* or *Paraense* (residents of Pará state) or even more broadly as people living in the Amazon (*gente de Amazônia*), rather than use ethnic categories.

As such it is noteworthy that Héctor chose to use not only an ethnic marker but also to identify primarily with an indigenous identity, even as he noted his mixed heritage (his '*Português*' maternal grandfather). While I did not encounter many people who identified primarily as indigenous in the area[11], there was a sense among the few that did that there has been a gradual valorization of indigenous identities in recent years. In part this can be seen in local and regional popular culture particularly in the growth, popularity and public promotion of the Sairé folkloric festival at the local touristic spot of Alter do Chão. Centered on the Amazonian legend of a river dolphin's seduction of a girl on a beach the festival features much indigenous/*caboclo* culture and imagery in the costumes, music and dances presented to the public (see Boyer 2016, Ros-Tonen

& Werneck 2009, *cf.* Watson's discussion of the BoiBumbá festival, this volume). Beyond such uses and displays of indigenous culture Héctor and others are also responding to the growing national and international coverage of indigenous peoples with an emphasis on their legal rights as well as their role in forest conservation and wider attempts to combat climate change. This is, in no small part, linked precisely to the view of indigenous people as being 'closer to nature' and having more environmentally sustainable livelihoods than others, that is of being modernity's 'other'. Thus, in local people's increasing willingness to self-identify in terms of their indigenous heritage there is an evident switch from a previous era in which emphasis would have been on their modern, non-Amazonian aspects.

In the 1990s Nugent wrote about the growing identification of *caboclo* populations with the sustainability agenda. He noted that this connection was in part 'trivial' as little of this outside concern actually focused on "what sustainable practices mean to those who practise them" (Nugent 1993:253). In contemporary Belterra this continues to be the case. This can be seen in my own encounter in which outside academics were focused on the archaeology of Héctor's farm rather than his current usage of the land[12]. More generally it can also be seen in the interventions of many environmental NGOs who are more likely to partner with those groups with the most apparently 'traditional' lifestyles. Faced with this reality it has become advantageous for individuals to adapt their own self-identifications to fit those outside conceptions. That is, there is an implicit recognition that to emphasize one's sustainable practices – and thus fit with the wider environmentalist agenda – one must emphasize indigeneity. Such transformations might be charged as cynical and inauthentic but, of course, riverine peoples and *caboclo/mestizo* identities have always carried an understanding of their indigenous roots. It was only the fact that indigeneity was so disparaged in the past that meant that this side of people's identities was

publically repressed. Indeed one might read this as the contemporary social manifestation of the theoretical point made by Nugent (1990:18) that in order to be taken seriously as 'real' Amazonians individuals and groups have to fit with *outside* expectations of the space. In the current reality neo-Amazonians can do this best by presenting themselves as *Índios*. That is, in contrast to the past, they have learned that their visibility increases the more they hide their modernity, a circumstance in which anthropology itself is implicated.

Such an account emphasizes the way in which identities are not static but can transform in relation to wider social and political frameworks a fact that undermines attempts to discern ontological separations. Coupled with the long archaeological and historical record of varied environmental use by local populations as well as the discussion of the complexity of Ford's understanding of modernity and ecology it is clear that the association of particular groups of people with particular uses of the environment may not be entirely productive, particularly in attempts to forge an alternative future. All of these observations of historical and contemporary complexity have some implications for the current apparent social and environmental divisions in the region, an issue to which I now turn.

GAUCHOS

The most recent wave of migrants to the area are agriculturalists from Brazil's southern states, known as *Gauchos*. Predominantly of northern-European descent and pushed by increasing land scarcity in the south, the rise of soy prices in the world market, the availability of new plant varieties and improvements to infrastructure most of these families have moved to the region to set up farming operations. Such incomers are usually characterized as arch-modernizers, dependent on technological approaches and with little regard for the forest and their

surroundings. However a closer analysis of their everyday discourse and practices show more complex understandings of and relations to their surroundings and again emphasises similarities with the living styles of other groups in the region.

Driving through parts of the outskirts of Belterra one is struck by the larger cleared areas and fields of soybeans. Yet in looking for the houses of the farm owners and workers, one always needed to look for clusters of trees and more secluded spaces. Then in talking with farm owners and workers a very similar dialogue to that of Miguel and Héctor would usually emerge about the value and importance of living in and surrounded by nature, of the fresh air and coolness offered by the trees and forest around the houses and of the wider importance of protecting the forest and its ecosystems. *Gaucho* families would discuss their dislike of São Paulo and even of Santarém, paralleling closely much of the discourse given by other families in the area.

Fig 4: Gaucho House

Moreover, during my time in Belterra it quickly became apparent that relatively few of the *Gaucho* families that I met were actually involved in large-scale, industrial agriculture, focused

instead on a few smaller fields. Most described themselves as 'family farms' (*agricultura familiar*) explicitly distinguishing themselves from the larger-scale industrial agriculture of companies such as the infamous Maggi corporation. One farmer carefully talked me through the economics of his business showing me the costs associated with buying seeds, pesticides and fertilizer and then how the yield and prices that he received for his crop would decide whether he ended up in overall profit after the harvest. He was very clear that he did not have any plans to expand the farm as he feared over-extending himself and then not being able to buy fertilizer for the next year, as has happened with others in the area.

In fact many of the families I met were struggling to keep any agricultural activities going at all. Many were dependent on at least one member of the family having paid employment in either the local government or businesses, with many commuting into Santarém to office jobs. Where agriculture was still a main source of income the farms had diversified their activities, planting manioc and corn along with a variety of fruits and vegetables that they sold at the market in Santarém. Such realities had many parallels to the stories of individuals and families of *nordestinos* who had come to the area in the 1960 and 70s. Encouraged by government programs and ideas of easy agricultural production in the region their plans had slowly been scaled back as the work and financial realities of agricultural production came into focus. Many of the *Gaucho* farms I visited were thus not too dissimilar from those of older *nordestino* families, or even of *caboclo* families, with evidence of mixed-cropping and a reliance of a range of economic opportunities. While the construction of their houses and presence of agricultural machinery and household appliances gave evidence of a higher standard of living and better access to credit and savings, their lifestyles were not necessarily different in kind from the longer-settled communities.

The social lives of *Gaucho* families also appeared to be adapting to their new surroundings. While being renowned locally for not socializing with other groups when they first arrived in the area, *Gaucho* families in my experience were steadily expanding their social networks. This was particularly true among the younger generations who had attended local schools and colleges. For their parents' generation, however, their social circles were also steadily expanding through relations of employing or being employed by others, trade relations and engagement with local forms of bureaucracy and politics. This move was also evident in terms of residence. Where early *Gaucho* families had built and lived in houses on their own farms, separate from other residential areas, many were now moving into older rural towns such as Belterra and the nearby Tabocal. Gauchos referred to growing communities such as Tabocal as '*agrovilas*' and emphasised that in such places they found a better balance between rural and urban living, particularly in terms of education, health care and links to public utilities. Such examples emphasize that while it is easy to equate such individuals with the worst excesses of environmental destruction the diversity of their individual economic statuses and personal opinions and actions make such generalizations difficult to hold in the local context. While it is too early to categorize *Gauchos* as neo-Amazonians their distinctions from other local groups are likely to diminish with time, as has that of *nordestinos* and other immigrant populations before them, particularly as their children become interconnected with the older population through economics, politics and kinship.

CONCLUSION

My focus in this article on the single example of Belterra may appear overly particular, yet its social and environmental complexity are representative of the wider Amazon region's physical and social history and contemporary reality. While space has not permitted detailed descriptions of further examples a closer consideration of any part of the region or group of people points to

similar levels of complexity. Archaeological findings from across the region attest to large-scale, landscape domestication (Erickson 2006, Roosevelt 1999, Heckenberger & Neves 2009) while there is evidence of complex interactions with the Inca empire in Western Amazonia (Varese 2002:39) and then the myriad forms of engagement that have occurred since contact with Europeans, not least during the era of rubber extraction that stretched across the region. The point that arises from the examples given in this article is that scratching the surface of any of these interactions is likely to emphasize the complexity of the ideologies and practices of the groups involved. Moreover, while it is important to note the relative economic, political and physical power differentiations that have characterized many of these encounters all groups and individuals involved have both contributed to and, in turn, been transformed by these processes.

In parallel to the manner in which archaeological findings and current social forms have emphasized the variety of ways in which indigenous groups have engaged with their surroundings, this article has also emphasized the diversity of such views within 'modern' groups as well. While Henry Ford's ecological views may not have come to dominate industrial society in the way that his assembly line manufacturing processes did they emphasize that modernity is not monolithic. Such closer study of the heterogeneity of modernist approaches specifically in relation to Amazonia, also shows the parallels that have emerged in the ways that different populations from pre-European-contact Santareños, through Henry Ford's village industry residents, to contemporary groups have sought to combine the benefits of their surroundings, agriculture and denser communal forms. This complexity and the drawing together of the moderns and unmoderns is important for emphasizing that all groups are dynamic and open to transformations and flows of change, not stuck within particular, rigidly separated ontological

categories. Such a dynamic view suggests that interactions between groups across the region and through time have occurred and brought transformations both internally and in relation to others.

In terms of anthropological theory this approach and argument is important for a number of reasons. The first is to further distance anthropology from the exoticization of different peoples, emphasizing connections as well as differences between societies. Neo-Amazonian populations are a salient example of this, as their relative absence from the anthropological literature and the implicit devaluing of their social and cultural lives has contributed to their wider social and political invisibility. In contrast, a focus on such populations offers evidence of how groups can embrace new diversity while also enduring through time. This stresses that not only are overly-simplified descriptions of societies likely to be intellectual constructions but also that separations and differences between societies over time are likely to diminish and transform as they find areas of common ground. It is this finding of common ground that underpins the overall importance of this approach. For, in line with Latour's own underlying aims as well as the reality of potentially catastrophic global climate change, it is only by looking for commonalities between apparently distinct groups that a common future is likely to be forged. Rather than trying to maintain artificial boundaries between groups a recognition of the hybrid nature of Amazonia and its people and landscapes may offer a more productive way forward.

NOTES

Research for this paper was supported by a Nuffield Foundation New Career Development Fellowship. I am grateful to my co-researchers on the project Diana Weinhold and Eustáquio J. Reis as well as the many people in the region who took the time to engage with me. I would also like to thank Suzanne Oakdale and Marnie Watson for first organizing the Modernity and Amazonia panel at the 2014 AAA meeting of which this paper formed a part and then for their continued support in turning the papers into the current volume. Finally my thanks to the three JAR reviewers for their detailed engagement with my writing and arguments which undoubtedly strengthened the final work.

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[1] Throughout this article I will use the term 'Amerindian' to refer to indigenous populations, this will mostly refer to Amazonian indigenous groups, this follows the usage common in the relevant

[2] Latour notes that "The "we" of the somewhat grandiloquent title [*We have Never Been Modern*] did not designate a specific people or a particular geography, but rather all those who expect Science to keep a radical distance from Politics" (2013:8).

[3] There are some notable exceptions including Nugent's own work (1993) the earlier work of Charles Wagley (1953) and Emilio Moran (1981) as well as the more recent work of Richard Pace (1998), Mark Harris (2000) and Jeremy Campbell (2015).

[4] The erratically diverse nature of this social reality is emphasized by the presence near Santarém of families of Confederate soldiers who had left the USA after the end of its civil war in 1865 (Dean 1987:45) as well as the descendants of Moroccan Sephardic Jews on the lower Amazon (Nugent 2007:46).

[5] The moniker for people from Brazil's northern-easterner states. In Santarém the majority of these people had origins in the state of Ceará.

[6] '*Português*' is used locally to refer to people whose recent heritage primarily lies outside of the region but usually from within Brazil. It is used in contrast to other categories of Brazilians including '*Gaucho*', for people from the South of Brazil of Northern European heritage and '*Negro*' for people of Afro-Brazilian descent.

[7] For all of the expenditure Dean notes that "for the first five years of its existence Fordlândia had no one resident on its staff, or even available as a consultant, with scientific training in tropical agriculture or practical experience in rubber planting" (Dean 1987:75). This lack of biological expertise and foreplanning was a key aspect of the demise of Ford's Brazilian projects which were ultimately deemed a costly failure by the company as leaf blight devastated the plantations as soon as they matured enough for the tree crowns to meet (Grandin 2009:316).

[8] There was a darker side to Ford's visions of the future in his anti-Semitism, made explicit in his use of his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, to publish articles railing against an imagined Jewish conspiracy to control the world (Grandin 2009:71). The origins, rationale and ultimate repudiation of this aspect of Ford's philosophy as well as its connections to Nazi ideas of environmentalism are beyond the scope of this article.

[9] Other examples of Ford's village industries included Iron Mountain in Michigan's Upper Peninsula where Ford constructed a similar town surrounded by timber forests with a sawmill, dam and parts factories and then spent money improving the region's towns' infrastructure and schools. Overall Ford established at least nineteen such sites across Michigan (Segal 2005:4) as well as others in the states of Ohio, Mississippi and New York.

[10] The archaeological evidence emphasises that representations and art forms changed over time as well as across the region (Roosevelt 1999).

[11] The nearby touristic town of Alter do Chão has recently seen the reemergence of the local Borari indigenous identity and culture (MacDonald 2010:67-96). I never made direct contact with members of this community but their cultural resurgence came up in many of my conversations about local identities often with some skepticism about the indigenous heritage of some of the specific individuals involved.

[12] It was also interesting to note that Héctor did not make any links between his own current practices and those of these historical groups.

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